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REPRINTED FROM APPLETONS' POPULAR SCIENCE MONTHLY FOR JUNE, 1898.

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A CRUISE AMONG HAIDA AND TLINGIT VILLAGES ABOUT DIXON'S ENTRANCE.*

By GEORGE A. DORSEY, Ph. D.,
FIELD COLUMBIAN MUSEUM, CHICAGO.

ON May 11th of this year, accompanied by Mr. E. P. Allen, the museum photographer, I left Chicago for a four months' tour among the Indians of the far West. The object of the journey was to secure material for the Department of Anthropology, more especially to get such objects as could be worked into groups to illustrate the culture history of the Western Indians, and also to secure material to represent the physical characteristics of certain of these races.

Between Chicago and the Pacific coast we visited three great families of Indians: the Blackfeet of Montana and Canada, the Flatheads of Montana, and the Kootenays of British Columbia and Idaho. When we reached Victoria, on June 19th, we had before us two groups of Indians on the northwest coast to visit—the Haidas and the Tsimshians.

As may be seen on an ethnographical map of the Northwest, the Haidas and Tsimshians are only two of five great stocks which are to be found on this coast. Beginning with the north are the Tlingits, who occupy the islands and coast of southern Alaska. Just to the south come the Haidas, who live on Dall and the Prince of Wales Islands of Alaska and the Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia. Next come the Tsimshians of the Nass and Skeena Rivers and the neighboring coast and islands. Below them are the Kwakiutls, inhabiting the coast from Gardiner Channel to Cape Mudge on the mainland and the west coast of Vancouver Island.

* From a lecture delivered in the Field Columbian Museum, November 6, 1897.

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The fifth and last group is the Salish, inhabiting the eastern half of Vancouver Island, the southwestern corner of the mainland of British Columbia, and parts of Washington, Idaho, and Montana.

It is not an easy matter to reach the Queen Charlotte Islands. The Victoria steamers touch at the town of Skidegate once a month, but remain for a few hours only, and the facilities for getting away from Skidegate are limited to Indian canoes. Furthermore, Skidegate and vicinity have been pretty thoroughly investigated by anthropologists, and we were especially desirous of visiting Masset, a

STREET IN MASSET. Queen Charlotte Islands.

remote Haida village on the northern shore of Graham Island, the largest of the Queen Charlotte group. This village is visited by steamers but once or twice a year, when the supplies are taken over for the Hudson Bay Company's post. We finally decided to take one of the British Columbia steamers, and land at Port Simpson, the chief town of the north coast and the one nearest to Masset. There we hoped it would be possible to secure some sort of a sailing vessel with which we could make our proposed journey.

After eight days of steaming along that most wonderful of inland seas we landed at Port Simpson, six hundred miles from Victoria, on June 30th. The prospect, after a few hours' survey of the barren beach and of the bay devoid of boats, was not cheerful; nor did the perpetual patter of the rain, nor the thick depressing fog,

nor the forlorn, deserted appearance of the town, contribute greatly to encourage a belief that our mission was to be successful. One thing, however, was in our favor: the Hudson Bay officer from Masset was in Simpson and was ready to return to his post. This fact, in the end, proved greatly to our advantage, for by his efforts we were enabled to secure one of the boats which had been used by the Canadian surveyors in running the international boundary line in 1895. So the Janet, the largest of the boats, was taken out of the sl. d and put into the water, and after two days' soaking it was found that the leakage could easily be kept in check, and she was pronounced seaworthy.

Our party numbered five: Mr. Stephens, the merchant; Mr. Chapman, our skipper; Mr. Deans, our guide; Mr. Allen, and myself.

Upon looking at a map of this region it would seem that the voyage from Port Simpson to Masset ought to be made with no difficulty, but Masset is almost seventy miles due west from Port Simpson, and the prevailing wind hereabout is from the west, and it blows with such force and persistency that Masset must be reached in a roundabout way. Long experience has taught that it is best not to attempt to make a direct passage, and that time is saved by sailing from one island to another along southern Alaska until Point Chacon or even Cape Muzon is gained. From either of these two points Masset is reached usually with but little difficulty. Another reason in favor of this circuitous route is the fact that out from the northeast corner of Graham Island projects a long sand bar, many miles in extent and known as Rose Spit. Over this long, low-lying reef the water breaks with great fury and the tide currents are almost irresistible. Rose Spit is the terror of the Northwest coast, and many are the schooners and canoes which have met an untimely end on its treacherous sands.

All this we knew when we set forth from Simpson at noon on July 3d, but little did we realize what all this meant. There certainly was nothing auspicious in our departure, as we started forth in the midst of a fog and drizzling rain, and after six hours we had only made North Dundas Island, not more than fifteen miles from Simpson. But, notwithstanding the fickle wind and the drizzling rain, the evening and night were happily spent. We had left behind us steamships and towns and civilization, conventionalism and restraint; we were now fairly out of the world. We were to see no boat but our own, nor a living being save at Masset.

On the following morning we were to make our first acquaintance with a specimen of the tides of this region. An early start had been our plan and our hope, and to this end we had our boat loaded,

were all aboard, had one sail up, and were ready to push off, but the Janet wouldn't push. When a tide has to fall twenty-two feet within two hours it can't afford to lose any time, and consequently it did not wait for us, and the Janet was hard aground and firm as a rock, and so we waited for the turn of the tide; we waited just five hours.

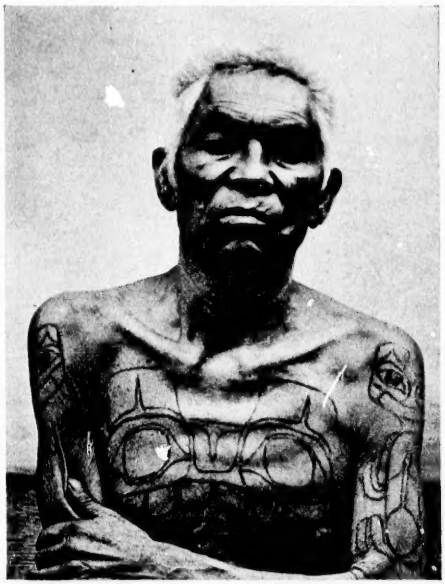
On account of this mishap the best we could do that day was to make Cape Fox, but that was not without some compensation, for we

HAIDA WOMAN OF MASSET WEAVING A BASKET.

thus spent the night of July 4th on Alaskan soil. By two o'clock on the following day we had gained Cape Northumberland and were snugly anchored in a cove on Kelp Island. The weather now was all that we could possibly wish, the sky was as clear as crystal, and far away on the mainland to the east we could see the sun glistening on the myriad ice-bound peaks of the coast mountains, while about us in every direction were the forest-covered tops of half-submerged mountain peaks which make up this sea of islands. The afternoon was one long to be remembered. Tents, blankets, and clothing were put out to dry, while we rambled through the forest, following paths

made by deer and bear down to the springs near our camp. The forests were a revelation—bathed in an almost eternal mist which has been tempered by the mild Japan ocean currents, they are indescribably green. Giant cedars, firs, spruce, and hemlock fairly crowd each other and leave but scant room for the ferns and underbrush which cover every inch of ground. Then there is a ruggedness about the shores of the islands; here absolutely barren, there piled high with drift, often to a height of sixty feet or more, which speaks eloquently for the mighty forces of Nature which never tire.

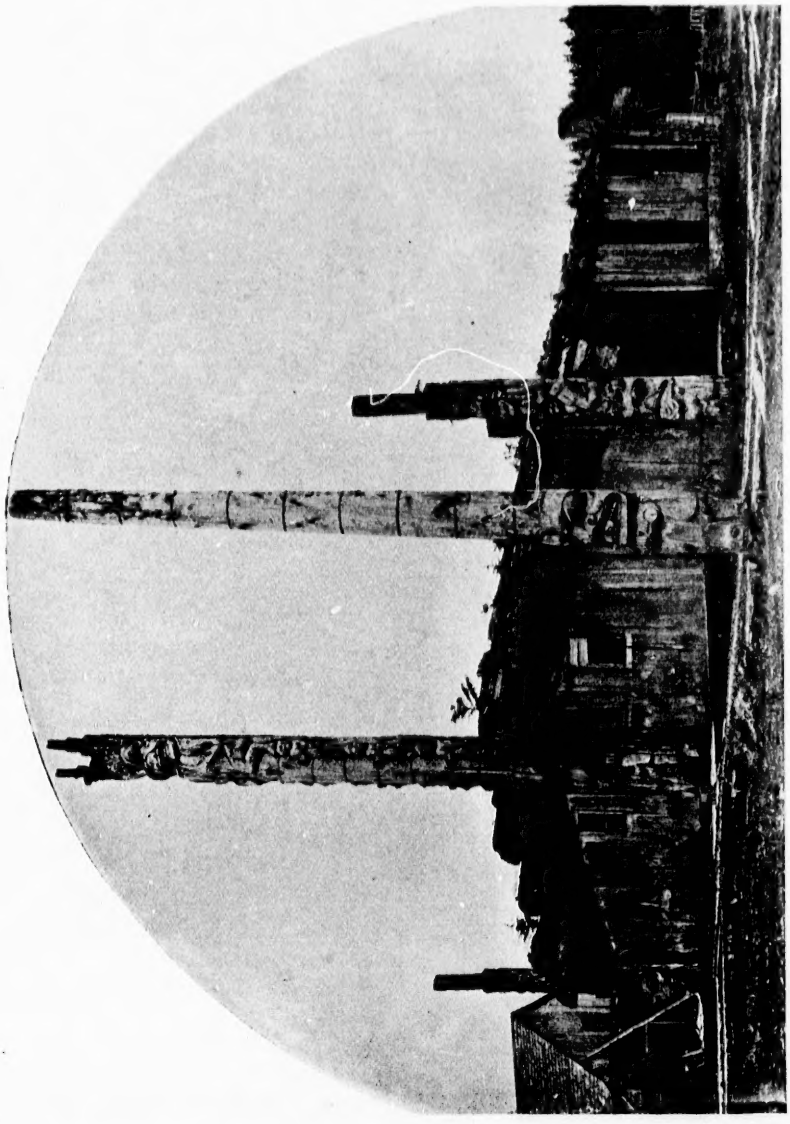
We left Cape Northumberland at three o'clock on the morning of July 6th, just as the sun was beginning to throw a ruddy glow over the ice-bound peaks on the mainland. By eleven o'clock we had rounded Devil's Rock, upon which the ill-fated Mexico was to strike only a few days later. At one o'clock we were within sight of Tow Hill, the most prominent point of the northeast shore of Graham Island. And then the wind veered to the west again. Harder and harder it blew until the sea was lashed into white foam. For twenty-six hours we beat in the face of that wind, now gaining a little to the west, now carried toward Rose Spit by a current which seemed stronger than the gale, and now so close to the shore that we could all too plainly hear the roar of the surf as it broke upon the rocks. Drenched to the skin, the waves breaking over us every few minutes, the air filled with spray, our boat half full of water at times, we passed twenty-six hours of wretchedness, misery, and abject fear. At times we were only a few feet from waves which, had they broken a little nearer, would have filled our boat and lowered us away to the bottom of the sea.



A Tattooed Haida of Masset.

On the following afternoon we began to put miles between our boat and Tow Hill, and were nearing the mouth of Masset Inlet.

With one more tack we have rounded the point and are headed due south, and a favorable tide bears us rapidly down the inlet; a



ANCIENT HOUSE OF CHIEF WEHA. Masset.

minute more and we sight Masset—a strange, quaint little sleepy village, with its tall totem poles and row of cottages.

Masset is one of the two villages which to-day make up all that is

left of the Haida nation on the Queen Charlotte Islands. The Haidas numbered seven thousand in 1840, and counted over thirty villages. To-day there are two inhabited villages and less than one thousand Haidas. They are a doomed race. Wars, smallpox, gross immorality, a change from old ways to new ways—their fate is the common fate of the American, whether he sails the sea in the North, gallops over the plain in the West, or sleeps in his hammock in the forests of Brazil. Masset typifies in itself that process of change and decay which we find going on among the aborigines all over the continent. The totem poles drop one by one; the great massive houses of the old times, with their mighty cedar beams, slowly succumb to the wind and the weather; the old grave posts totter and fall, but their ranks are not filled up. In their stead are little stuffy, propped-up cottages with iron stoves and glass windows, and by the side of this modern village is the marble burying ground with marble columns brought from Victoria. Masset is the Clyde of the coast, and in the fall and winter the little street along the water's edge is lined with great cedar logs, which are being chipped, steamed, pressed, and fashioned into canoes, some over fifty feet long. Strong and well built, the Haidas make journeys in them of hundreds of miles—they are the vikings of the New World. Another important industry of the town consists of weaving cedar bark into mats and baskets. These mats are strong and well made, and serve innumerable purposes, the chief uses being for the floor and for the outside covers of bundles and packages. But their principal utensil for carrying is the white basket made of closely woven splints of maple.

The real interest in Masset, as well as that of other Indian villages of this region, lies in the past; and to the past we turn. Beginning with the ancient customs, we look in vain for the great labret or lip ornament of old, which formerly played such an important part in the fashion in deformity. We did see one woman with a tiny plug in her lip, but from this one can form no estimate of the extent to which this custom was formerly carried. Of the tattooing little remains, for the custom has long since been given up. But the majority of the middle-aged men and women have their arms and legs tattooed; and by dint of much persuasion and a piece of silver we induced a decrepit old man to leave his house long enough to enable us to carry away the photograph of his totem, which was tattooed on his breast.

The physical characteristics of the Haidas are peculiar and are to be explained by the circumstances under which they live. With but little exposure to the sun their complexion is very much lighter than that of the coast tribes, and indeed often for fairness com-

pares very favorably with that of the Europeans. They have a full, broad face, large eyes, a nose rather delicately molded, and prominent cheek bones. The hair is jet black, thick, and heavy. The men usually keep the hair plucked from the face, but where the beard is allowed to grow it is generally thin and scant, and is almost confined to the mustache. With both sexes the hair grows low over the forehead. Twice while in Masset we encountered faces which in their features seemed unusual and out of place. On inquiry we learned that they were both slaves who had been taken in war from the coast Indians long ago.

Owing to their almost constant seafaring life, the Haidas have long and powerfully developed arms, while their legs are propor-

A Tlingit Shaman's Grave on Duke Island.

tionately short. A single glance at a Haida walking is sufficient to convince one that he is more at home in a canoe than on the land.

Of the ancient houses in Masset not one remains in good condition. But stately even in its ruins still stands the historic house of old Chief Weha. It is composed of massive beams and walls of great, wide, rough-hewn cedar planks. Its entrance is still guarded by the ever-present totem pole, which is one of the best in the village. The interior is even more interesting than the exterior, for it reveals the massiveness of the timbers and the solidarity of these houses. When one looks upon such a structure as this and compares it with the ramshackle cottages of to-day, the feeling forces itself

upon one that in this respect as in many others the Haidas have given up the substance for the shadow.

It is sad to relate, but it is true, that the day is not far distant when there will not be a single totem pole in British Columbia. I believe I am safe in saying that another one will never be erected. The old ones do not fall of their own accord as fast as they are cut down; for, strange as it may seem, the natives actually cut down one or more poles every winter for firewood, and in this they are encouraged by the missionaries. The totem pole is a coat of arms, it is an epitome of the owner's mythical ancestry; from its curious conventionalized animals or hieroglyphs we read into the past, of the time of their garden of Eden, and of their struggles and friendships with the monsters of the deep and the creatures of the land and air. The totem pole stands immediately in front of the dwelling, and in its more ancient form was even an intrinsic part of the house, for an oval opening at the base of the pole served as the entrance.

In addition to the totem poles there was erected in former times an additional pole at one side, near the front of the house, which answered the purpose of a mortuary or memorial column. This pole is usually quite plain, and is surmounted by the crest of the man in whose honor it was erected. Several of these are still standing at Masset, one of the best preserved being the bear column in front of old Chief Edenshaw's house. Farther down the beach we came to another pole which was surmounted by a conical structure which bears a close resemblance to a Haida hat, and, in fact, they relate in Masset that it actually is intended to represent a hat. This pole is not duplicated elsewhere on the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Of the ancient burial columns but two remain standing, the others having been pulled down and the dead buried in the little modern cemetery. The first column is single and stands near the water's edge. On the side facing the village and near to the top a rectangular cavity had been chiseled out within which was placed the box containing the body. The other burial structure is in the form of a double column or two posts, whose tops are united by a hollow, boxlike crossbar. In such burial columns as this were usually placed two or more bodies, and in some even entire families.

More photographs, purchases of relics, and measurements of heads, and we were ready to leave this half-modern, half-barbarian, half-dead, half-alive village, for others which knew neither teacher nor preacher, but which were long since abandoned and given over to solitude, to moss, and cedar trees, to snails and hoarse-throated ravens.

Skirting along the western half of the northern shore of Graham Island, we made our first stop at Yan, about three miles from Masset.

Here, as elsewhere, we encountered a luxuriant vegetation which covers every inch of the soil, and even mounts to the top of the burial columns and to the decaying rafters and beams of the great old houses. Probably the most interesting object we saw at Yan was a mortuary column, the crossbar or the coffin-box support of which was of a single board, and most handsomely carved in totemic designs. After pushing and crawling for an hour through wet underbrush, made up largely of salmon and rose bushes over three inches in diameter and from fifteen to twenty feet high, we were off again, and that night, with the friendly assistance of a

EGG-SHAPED ROCK CONTAINING BURIAL HOUSE OF A HAIDA SHAMAN.

favorable tide, we dropped down into Virago Sound and anchored in front of the old moss-covered village of Kung. This was one of the best of the old villages along this coast, but is now completely deserted. We found much to interest us. The totem pole with the moon symbol was the first we had seen, nor is it reproduced elsewhere on the island; but what proved of special interest were several very old graves which faced the beach on the east side of the village. These were the burial places of medicine men or Shamans, and quite different from the ordinary grave. Instead of a single pole in which the body is placed through a hole in the top or at the side, or from the double-pole platform grave which we saw at Kung, we found a little house built of short cedar logs. Inside was placed

the Shaman in a long coffin-box, reclining at full length with his rattles and other ceremonial paraphernalia about him. With one had been placed several very fine masks, but they had almost entirely crumbled into dust. The grave of the old chief at Kung was the best I had seen. Four short, stout posts had been firmly planted in the ground, and on the inner corners of each grooves had been cut out to receive the beams that supported the little house, in which lay the chief in state. The structure was nearly buried in a thick growth of vegetation, and much work with the axe was needed before the beautifully carved posts could be rendered visible to the camera.

Leaving Kung at ten o'clock in the morning, we set out for the

GRAVE OF A HAIDA CHIEF. Queen Charlotte Islands.

extreme northwestern shore of the island, and that night anchored in a little cove on North Island. We were now on deserted but historic ground, for it was here in 1787 that Dixon first traded with the Haidas, and in one day secured over three hundred sea-otter skins, which to-day are so extremely precious. This was the opening of the fur trade on the Northwest coast, and from this memorable day's trade sprang up a commerce in furs which has continued down to the present time.

Fortunately for us, one of the old houses had been re-roofed by some previous visitor, and so we found within dry cedar planks upon which to spread our blankets for the night.

On the following morning we crossed over to the old village of Kiooste, where there is much of interest; but the place is so overgrown with underbrush that it was only with the greatest difficulty that we could get from one house to another. Recrossing the strait to North Island and anchoring our boat to a piece of kelp, we explored the little egg-shaped rock of Gorgie Sethlingun Nah, or Gorgie's Coffin House. Gorgie was a famous Shaman of Kiooste, and when he died was laid to rest in a handsome little house on the summit of this island. By much hard work we were able to reach the top of the rock, but the house had tumbled into ruin, and two hats were all that remained to tell of the former glory of Gorgie.

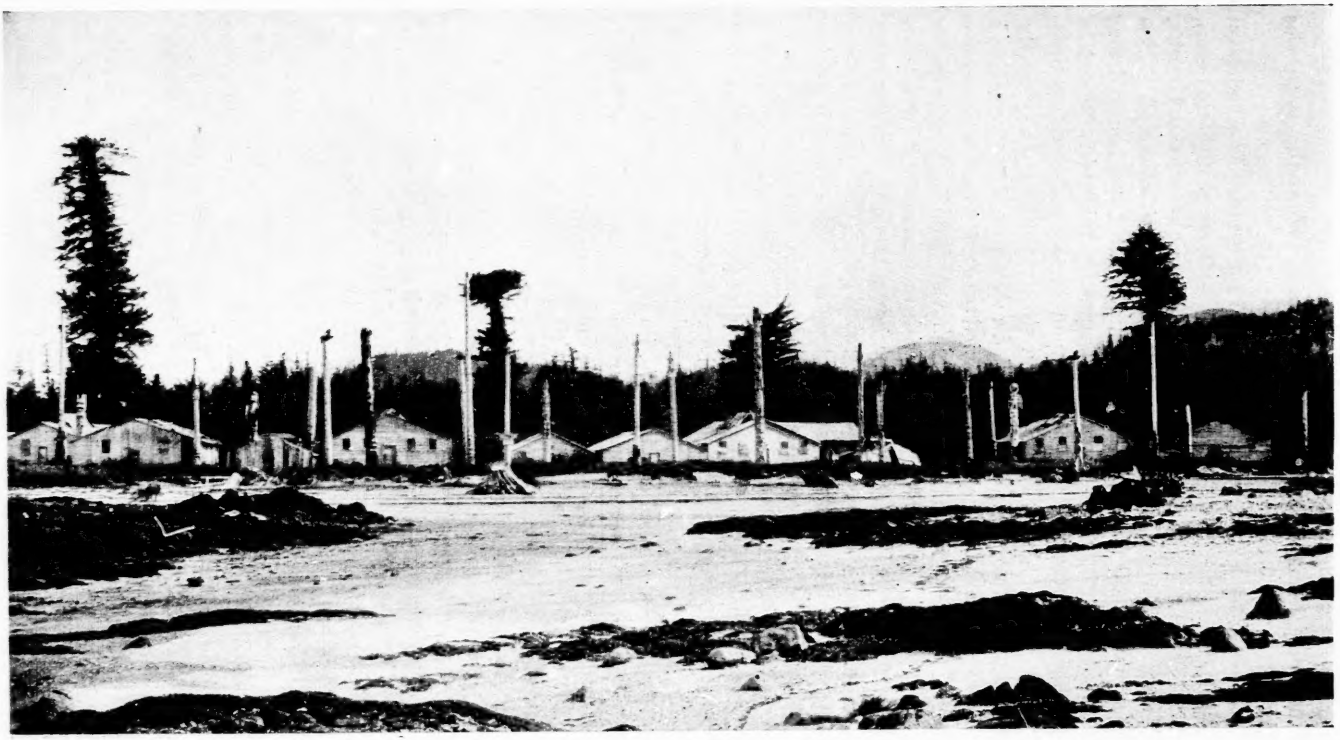
Next day we explored the cave of Skungonah. Skungonah was a hermit who lived over a hundred years ago and dwelt here alone, living on raw fish and birds. But in after years the great cave became the burial ground of Kiooste.

We were now obliged to return to Masset for provisions. Leaving Masset at half past ten in the morning, we entered the harbor of Old Tongas at half past nine the same night, having made eighty miles in eleven hours.

We were now in the country of the Tlingits, and before us was Old Tongas—old because it was long since abandoned, and its inhabitants had formed another or New Tongas. Tongas is the southernmost of a chain of Tlingit villages which extends as far north as the Aleutian Islands. Like the Haidas, the Tlingits are slowly but surely disappearing, and the time must soon come when the race will be entirely extinct.

There is but little of interest to-day in Old Tongas except the totem poles and the old ruined houses. Totems with the Tlingits play the same important part in their civil and religious life that they do among the Haidas. Even the corner posts of their houses are carved into totemic designs. Comparing their totem poles and memorial columns with those which we saw in the Haida villages, it becomes apparent at once that the symbols are more boldly executed and the conventionalism less pronounced. The figures are not blended and combined as they are among the Haidas. We noticed also that the human figure is repeated over and over again, and is always portrayed with a boldness and fidelity that are worthy of the highest praise.

One of the unique features of Old Tongas, and one we saw nowhere else, was the ruin of a house which still retained its old front porch made up of heavy logs; while in front, leading up to the porch, was a pair of primitive steps hewn out of a solid log. In another place, almost entirely obscured by vegetation, we came upon a recent house grave surmounted by a cross, showing that the



TLINGIT VILLAGE OF NEW TONGAS. Alaska.

influence of missionaries had been felt here before the town was deserted.

At ten o'clock we started toward the east again. We had been disappointed in not finding the grave of a Shaman or medicine man. It is no easy matter to secure osteological material from the Tlingits, for until within a very few years the dead were cremated. This rule, however, did not apply to the Shamans, for it was believed that their bodies would not burn, and consequently they were placed in little house graves usually erected upon some lonely rock or picturesque promontory. We had been slowly working away at the oars, for the wind had completely died away, and were rounding a point on Duke Island, when we espied one of these little houses perched far up on a rocky point which was piled high with innumerable drift. We were soon ashore with the camera and found ourselves well repaid for our pains. The house was about thirty years old, and its roof was covered with a thick growth of moss. It was about five feet high and nearly six feet square. Removing a portion of one of the walls, we could see the body, which had been carefully wrapped in several cedar-bark mats, and tied into a neat bundle with stout cedar-bark rope. Over the bundle were branches of bog myrtle, and under the head was a box. Removing the wrapping still further, we disclosed the desiccated body of a woman doctor. In one hand she clasped a long knife, its steel blade entirely wasted away, leaving only the handle. In the other hand was a beautifully carved wooden pipe inlaid with finely polished abalone shells; but her real title to distinction lay in the immense wooden plug or labret which still remained in her lower lip. Throughout the entire Northwest coast the labret was a mark of honor, and the larger its size the more honor it conferred, for every time a new labret of larger size was inserted it necessitated the giving of a great potlatch, or present-distributing feast. It is related that in the olden times disputes between women were often settled by one of the disputants, scornfully pointing one hand at her enemies and laying a finger on her own labret, declaiming in a manner at once emphatic and conclusive, "My labret is bigger than yours."

Our next stopping place was New Tongas, which we reached at six o'clock on the following afternoon. We were soon ashore, but our expectations were not fulfilled, for in this town of *New* Tongas there was not a single living soul; all were away at work in the salmon canneries.

The location of the town is most delightful. It stands on a little island facing a long, rocky beach. At the rear of the village is a dense forest of cedars, pines, and spruces. The architecture displayed in the houses is not of the usual white man's cottage order,

but the plans of the old times have been followed, so that the houses bear a superficial resemblance to their former dwellings. In the place of massive beams and three or four foot cedar planks, however, are light frames and thin, narrow weather-boards. Most of the houses have two or more windows, which are often boarded up and are generally without glass.

In still another respect this modern village has preserved one of the old-time features of house building. We looked in vain for any chimney, but found instead a square opening in the center of the roof, partially covered over, through which the smoke makes its exit. Of the many interesting totem poles two may be noticed particularly. The first stands by the side of the present chief's house, and has been erected within a few years. The designs are well made and of an unusual character. The other totem pole is one of the largest in Alaska, and was put up during the life of Ebbits, a Tongas chief who was named in honor of one of John Jacob Astor's captains. A tablet near by reads:

"TO THE MEMORY OF EBBITS,
HEAD CHIEF OF THE TONGAS,
WHO DIED IN 1880, AGED 100 YEARS."

At one o'clock we started for Simpson. The run of twelve miles was made in about two hours, and within less than half a day's time we were aboard the magnificent steamer Islander, bound for Port Essington.